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ABSTRACT

The relationship between literacy, welfare, and work was examined in an exploratory study that included a literature review and focus group interviews with a total of 17 literacy instructors and 10 literacy students from two locations in Manitoba: Winnipeg and Brandon with the rural area surrounding it. Particular attention was paid to the connection between illiteracy and unemployment, poverty and other barriers to education and employment, the lack of "real jobs," and the impact of welfare reforms on the literacy community. The study underscored the importance of literacy education in achieving employment and alleviating poverty and the numerous barriers faced by students moving from welfare to work. The relationship between education and work was determined to be very complex. It was concluded that literacy students and instructors need more information on welfare legislation and the labor market and better support services and that the current climate of welfare reform requires more dialogue, flexibility, and student input in decision making. (Appended are 22 recommended resources for teaching literacy and employability and the focus group discussion guides used with the literacy instructors and students. The report contains 53 references. Addresses and phone numbers of six Canadian literacy-related organizations conclude the document.) (MN)

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ED 460 272

Literacy Welfare & Work

PRELIMINARY STUDY

Submitted by: The Coalition For Brandon Literacy Services (CBLS)

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Funding by: National Literacy Secretariat, HRDC

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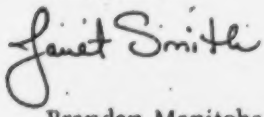
I would like to thank the following organizations for supporting the development of this research project: The Coalition For Brandon Literacy and Continuing Education (Manitoba Education And Training), and The National Literacy Secretariat (Human Resources Development Canada).

In particular, I wish to acknowledge the members of my Advisory Committee - Diane Eastman, Eileen Cable, Sylvia Provenski, Marie Matheson, and Lauren Gauletz - who weathered the many storms and adjusted their own busy schedules to assist me with the project along the way. Thanks also to Dr. Debbie D'Amico of New York City and Dr. Barbara Gfellner of Brandon University who provided excellent advice throughout the project. My research assistant, Caroline Slimmon, spent many hours transcribing the audio tapes, and also helped to analyse the focus group results. Her work was invaluable.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge all the literacy instructors, students, and other individuals who participated in focus groups or personal interviews. Thank you all for sharing your words.

Janet Smith



Brandon, Manitoba
August, 1997

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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE & CONTENT

The LWW study was a collaborative effort of the Coalition for Brandon Literacy Services (CBLS) and the researcher, Janet Smith. Throughout this report, references in the third-person ("we"), meaning the LWW Advisory Committee and the researcher) alternate with the first-person voice, reflecting the specific activities or perspectives of the researcher/writer.

While the Advisory Committee provided much-needed assistance and support throughout the project, the views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of individual Committee members, the Coalition for Brandon Literacy Services, or the National Literacy Secretariat. CBLS does however, endorse this report as an important contribution to literacy research.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy programs are beginning to feel the impact of new federal and provincial welfare legislation that links literacy to work. However, there is a lack of information on what the legislation actually says, how the new "employment enhancement" policies are being implemented, and how literacy instructors and students are experiencing and responding to these changes. There is also a scarcity of information relating literacy to work, within the context of 'Welfare Reform'.

It is incumbent upon the literacy field to understand the new socioeconomic and political *context* within which we are working; to identify the *perceptions and experiences* of both literacy workers and learners in relation to this context; and to begin an examination of the many factors that impact on students' abilities to find and keep a job. The Literacy, Welfare, and Work (LWW) Preliminary Study is an attempt to enhance our understanding of these critical issues and questions.

This study should be viewed as *exploratory* in nature. It is intended as a *"first look"* at the complex relationship between education (specifically adult literacy) and employment. The study will also provide a *framework* for more extensive long-term research, namely the Literacy, Welfare & Work Longitudinal Research Project (slated to begin in September, 1997). This multi-phase research project will build upon the findings of the Preliminary Study, tracking individual students over time with a view to evaluate the role that literacy training plays in employment.

We hope that this report, and the LWW Longitudinal Research Project as a whole, will contribute to the growing debate within literacy circles and elsewhere on ' 'welfare reform', education, and work, and that it will become a stepping stone to more extensive discussions and research.

Your comments and questions are appreciated. Please contact:

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GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The LWW Preliminary Study set out to:

- understand the currents trends within welfare legislation and the labour market; and
- to explore the perceptions and experiences of a select number of literacy students and instructors in relation to these changes.

The following goals, with accompanying objectives and methodologies, became the framework for exploring this topic.

Goal #1

To conduct a *Literature Review* of selected sources in order to analyse information on current national and provincial welfare reform legislation, labour market forces, and the relationship of these to literacy education.

Objective A · to collect, review & analyse literature related to these issues
Objective B · to utilize any relevant information in the focus group design;
Objective C · to summarize this information in the final report.

Goal #2

To design and conduct *Focus Group Interviews* (FGI's) among: (a) literacy instructors and (b) literacy students on welfare (social assistance) - in order to determine group perceptions and experiences related to literacy programming, employment, and the changes to welfare reform (incl. any curriculum/ resources being used).

Objective A · to create the FGI design;
Objective B · to conduct the FGI's at 2 sites: Brandon and Winnipeg;
Objective C · to collect and analyse data;
Objective D · to document all aspects of the research for the final report.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the LWW study was collected in two main ways: a literature review and focus group interviews (FGI's). This combined methodology ensured that the experiences and perceptions of individuals were placed within the larger socioeconomic and political context. Information gathered from the literature also facilitated the interpretation of focus group results, and vice-versa. Thus, one method informed and enriched the other.

Literature Review

The Literature Review consisted of information-gathering from a variety of sources including: newspaper articles, journals, books, magazines, and meeting notes. Key informants were also interviewed in order to verify, dispute, and/or elaborate on data obtained from the literature. Information was grouped into 4 main areas: Definitions of Literacy, Illiteracy and Unemployment, Other Barriers To Employment, Labour Market Issues, and 'Welfare Reform'.

A focus group interview is a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment"

Focus Group Interviews

A focus group interview is a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Agar and MacDonald: 1995, p.78). The main advantage of the FGI method is its ability to provide a "snapshot" of group insights that can then be tested on a larger population. This is particularly important when time and resources are limited, and when no extensive research exists on a particular topic.

"When there is little prior research in an area... focus groups can be used to help the researcher to formulate a research model and to develop instruments that are appropriate to the population and phenomenon under study. Focus group dialogues allow researchers to capture in-depth contextual detail that facilitates an understanding of group experiences and perspectives." (Hughes and Dumont, 1993, pp. 782-783)

Focus groups also offer a certain degree of personal 'safety' and group synergy. People who share similar backgrounds and concerns have been found to share more openly in a group setting than in one-to-one interviews. Group brainstorming can also elicit views that might not otherwise be voiced (Lederman: 1990, p. 118-120).

The target population for the FGI's included 2 groups of literacy instructors and 2 student groups. The sample groups represented (i) Brandon and rural community-based literacy programs and (ii) Winnipeg 'Community Partnerships' (CP) programs. Ten literacy students were interviewed: 6 from Brandon and area and 4 from Winnipeg. Seventeen instructors were interviewed: 10 from Brandon and area and 7 from Winnipeg.

Community Partnerships is a newly developed program within the Employment Development division of Employment Development/Literacy. CP programs have a specific 'employment-oriented' focus, and are run over a shorter time frame than most regular literacy programs. Because of LWW's focus on employment, we felt that such a comparison (while small) might provide us with useful data.

What the study does provide however, is important preliminary information and insights into possible trends within the field of literacy and employment training.

Limitations and uses of the methodology

The LWW Preliminary Study was limited overall by constraints of time and resources. Under these conditions, it was only possible to conduct four FGI's. Research findings from this methodology therefore cannot be generalized to the larger population. As well, some of the focus group questions were too general, and did not adequately address several key issues.

What the study does provide however, is important preliminary information and insights into possible trends within the field of literacy and employment training. LWW will thus be used as a jumping-off point for further research (the LWW Longitudinal Research Project) that will utilize a more comprehensive, case study approach.

[1] The discussion guides used in the FGI's are included in the Appendix. The complete transcribed texts are available from the author upon request.

FIRST, SOME DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY...

Why begin a discourse on literacy research with a discussion of definitions? First, literacy has many faces and therefore many meanings: workplace literacy, computer literacy, adult basic education, popular literacy, etc. Literacy definitions and perspectives affect literacy funding, programming and practice (such as literacy to work initiatives) and therefore should be made clear. Also, literacy research, like any other form of qualitative investigation, is a reflection of the researcher's own views, definitions and approaches, which should be stated.

By outlining some of the perspectives found within the literature and revealed in FGI's, I hope to provide a framework upon which much of the debate is taking place. I will also clarify my own perspectives and definitions of literacy, so that the reader understands how I came to view and analyse the research: "putting myself into the picture", so to speak.[2]

The 'Faces' of Literacy

"using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential"

Within the general population, the prevailing concept of literacy remains "the ability to read, write, and do math". Most literacy practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers however, have broadened their definitions significantly. The recently-released International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), for example, defines literacy in terms of skills that help adults to cope in an increasingly complex world, namely,

> *"using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Statistics Canada: 1995, p. 14)*

The FGI's confirmed that most of the literacy instructors reflect a similar view. Here are some of their comments:

> *"Literacy is being able to perform the functions (reading, writing, math, and computers) required to provide for one's self and one's family in today's world."*

> *"My definition of literacy is just helping people reach their academic and personal needs and goals - whatever they are."*

[2] Putting oneself "into the picture" is a basic tenant of Participatory Action Research. It acknowledges that no research is unbiased and that stating ones assumptions and perspectives, the research is in fact more accessible to the reader. Participatory Action Research can be defined as "the collection and analysis of information by a group of people for the purpose of taking actions and making change" (Samaritan House PAR Group (co-authored by Janet Smith) *Where There Is Life, There Is Hope, 1995, p. 36).*

Indeed, most literacy practitioners do not define literacy one-dimensionally (illiteracy vs. literacy), but rather as a continuum. In this way individuals, and in fact whole cultures, display different 'faces of literacy ' which change over time and within various contexts. As one practitioner stated:

"I think that most people feel that they are functioning within their needs until they come up against needing to get a job or some other kind of issue.. (Literacy) has to be an open-ended thing. It changes at different times."

A number of researchers and literacy practitioners have begun to go even further, defining illiteracy in terms of its underlying causes, as well as its effects. Within this broad perspective, iliteracy is viewed as a type of systemic disadvantage such as unemployment, poverty, and social discrimination.[3] In its 1992 study, (Literacy And Poverty: A View From the Inside), the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) talked about the issue in this way:

> *"Literacy is usually only one of many problems for learners, with poverty, racism and other forms of systemic injustice being the greatest obstacles to a better life. (Literacy workers) saw literacy as a possible first step over these barriers, but added that these barriers themselves can block the way to literacy acquisition". (p. 13)*

my research views illiteracy as being inextricably linked to other social, economic, and political forces. The relationship between literacy education, welfare, and employment therefore cannot be reduced to a simple literacy = work formula.

As in the NAPO study, my research views illiteracy as being inextricably linked to other social, economic, and political forces. The relationship between literacy education, welfare, and employment therefore cannot be reduced to a simple literacy = work formula. While education remains a very important determinant of job success, it is not the only factor. A number of other issues affect a person's ability to find and keep a job, including personal and systemic barriers, and the job market situation itself.

The next few chapters in the LWW report are devoted to a preliminary examination of this complex relationship between literacy, welfare, and work. I have focused on issues of unemployment, poverty and other barriers to employment and education, as well as the current role that welfare policies play in the lives of literacy students and in literacy programming. I have drawn upon the voices of literacy students and instructors, as well as current literature related to the topic.

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[3] While most of the instructors I interviewed alluded to the root causes of illiteracy, few actually defined it in such broad of terms. This was perhaps due to limitations of the question as well as to the complexity of the issue itself. Instructors were only asked what their definition of literacy is, not what the causes of illiteracy are. See Focus Group discussion Guide in Appendix.

ILLITERACY & UNEMPLOYMENT

What's The Connection?

People with literacy problems in Canada have 2/3 the income of other Canadians, are twice as likely to be unemployed, and many more times more likely to receive some form of social assistance. Jobs available to lower-literacy adults tend to be the lowest-paid, and the most insecure. (National Anti-Poverty Organization: NAPO Facts, October, 1992)

When talking about illiteracy, we must also talk about poverty and unemployment. People with literacy problems in Canada have 2/3 the income of other Canadians, are twice as likely to be unemployed, and many more times more likely to receive some form of social assistance. Jobs available to lower-literacy adults tend to be the lowest-paid, and the most insecure. (National Anti-Poverty Organization: NAPO Facts, October, 1992)

Limited reading, writing, and math skills mean fewer opportunities for employment. In today's "high-tech" , information-based economy, literacy skills are a must. Even manual and service sector jobs often require a minimum of Grade 12 education. The IALS report summarizes the changes to the so-called "new economy" in this way:

> *"The emerging economy changes both the expectations and demands on the population. In this new context information is abundant. Those lacking the skills and opportunities to access, organize and use this information in novel ways are at a disadvantage."* (Statistics Canada: 1995, p. 23)

All the students and instructors I interviewed recognize that literacy education is a very important step toward employment. Here are some of their comments:

"I feel its better for us to get educated first because when I went out there trying to get a job I became really down and my self-esteem got worse, thinking: 'Nobody wants me - I'm useless'.. So I really found that coming to these classes made a big difference".

> *Instructor: "(Literacy skills) are most necessary in any kind of job situation. There are very few jobs where you are not involved with people or having to read manuals or communicate with people".*
>
> *Instructor: "(Literacy) is key. If students can't read and write well enough to meet what they see as as the necessary steps - which might be university or college or computer..or filling out the forms so that they can do their professional driving etc. Its key."*
>
> *"I feel its better for us to get educated first because when I went out there trying to get a job I became really down and my self-esteem got worse, thinking: 'Nobody wants me - I'm useless'.. So I really found that coming to these classes made a big difference".*

While illiteracy is a major impediment to employment, few would agree that it is the only factor. Other barriers exist as well, many of which are the result of structural disadvantages such as poverty and racism.

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POVERTY & OTHER BARRIERS TO EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

The cycle of poverty and illiteracy is well-documented. Study after study has pointed out that poverty affects every aspect of a child's mental, physical, and intellectual development, and that poor children face a higher chance of growing up undereducated and underemployed. Poor children also tend to be labelled and 'streamed' into non-academic programs.

> *"Low income earners and the long-term unemployed, Native people, seniors, prisoners, people with disabilities, racial and cultural minorities - all have higher than average rates of both under-education and poverty. They speak of the difficulties of growing up in poor, disadvantaged homes, of beginning life with fewer opportunities dwindled further in schools biased against children from poor families, against people receiving social assistance, against minorities. They pinpoint their main problems today as unemployment, lack of money and inadequate housing - the same problems their families faced."* (National Anti-Poverty Organization: *Literacy And Poverty: A View From the Inside*, 1992, p.2)

As lower-literate adults, barriers to education and employment continue to make it difficult to break out of poverty. These barriers include: lack of appropriate, accessible education and training programs; support systems (including child care, transportation, etc.); poor health and nutrition; inadequate housing; stress; low self-esteem; issues of violence and abuse; addictions, and discrimination based on race, class, gender and ability levels. (NAPO: 1992, p. 25).

Stories shared by literacy students speak clearly of these past experiences, and of the challenges they face today as they go back to school as adults:

> *"I quit at 16. I had grade 7 but my mom and dad made me quit because mom was already sick and I had to help around the house. I didn't want to quit but I had to."*

> *"Child care is a barrier. I have a 3 yr. old and 2 yr, old at home. Its hard to juggle school and children."*

> *"There is some discrimination out there. For the Native culture they are stuck doing the dirtiest jobs... Plain and simple: you walk into a bank and you count and see how many native or other (minority) culture people are there. There are few".*

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* Mitchell, Alanna, *"The poor fare worst in schools"*, Globe & Mail, Toronto, April 18, 1997

"I went to school in a small town. My principal discouraged me the most from my education, even though I had lots of problems learning and understanding... I used to act up because the teachers didn't want to take the time to understand me. And when I was sent to the principal's office I would have my head smashed against a brick wall. So as I got into grade 4 and that, I started acting up even more. I wasn't paying attention any more and then I got kicked out of that one because I didn't want to be there... Then we got to the point where my father lost his job and, being in a small town, it was harder to find work so we moved. They put me back a year and as I continued in school the help and understanding wasn't there from the teachers. I continued my outbursts. I asked for help numerous times and never got it. By the time I hit my high school days I really knew nothing... I have my grade 7 but not 8 and 9. They just pushed me through the system and by the time I got my grade 10 I knew so little that all I had to do was attend class and they would give me marks for attending school. And I just got to the point when I said: 'What am I doing here? I am doing nothing anyway'. I felt that I knew nothing and that I was stupid. Even to this day my wife gets upset with me because I put myself down all the time. I'll say I'm stupid.... I wanted to do upgrading at one time but I was always scared to go back into the system. So finally I made a choice to join the (literacy) program. I thought: 'I have 4 kids here and a wife to support. You have to do something', and I more or less pushed myself out the door to do it."

"We survive on garage sales, 'Sally Ann', low grade food... We haven't starved yet but we don't eat all that well... I shop really carefully."

"In 1978 my father passed away and my mother had myself, my brother, my grandfather and her two grandchildren that she was caring for and she was the manager of (a store). To keep the house running, a lot of times I was taken out of school to watch the little ones. At the time it didn't really bother me because I knew my mum was trying so hard. We had just lost my father and I thought I could make up for it. Unfortunately I didn't do it that way. As I got into my teen years I started getting into drinking and hanging out with friends and forgot about school altogether. Every year my mum would make me enrol in school and she tried her best to send me and most of the time I would skip school. Then I made it to grade 4 and after that my mum kept me out of school a lot. When I was 11 the elementary school I was in felt I was too old and that I should be with kids my own age. They sent me to Special Ed grade 7... I went to 7, 8, 9 and 10 - all Special Ed. I didn't complete anything in those programs as far as education. When I became a young adult I went to social services for a couple of months and then I found a job doing cleaning. After losing my job at first I was very upset and I didn't want to do anything and I didn't really care and stuff. But I have a little girl who is 5 and she started school last year... I woke up one morning and was scared to death of the day she would come home and say 'mum I need some help'. It scared me so badly ... so I want to go back to school and I want to learn all I can to better myself and give my daughter a better future so we won't have to be on assistance. So that's it."

"We survive on garage sales, 'Sally Ann', low grade food... We haven't starved yet but we don't eat all that well... I shop really carefully."

Literacy workers also described some of the barriers to employment and education that exist for their students:

"I don't think students should be penalised for missing because they haven't got transportation. It was supposed to be one of the things that was guaranteed for this project. I have a student who has been in this program since January and who still doesn't have a bus pass. She's been walking every day (for 6 months).Some of my students tell me that they came to school because they wanted to be there with their last bus ticket. They knew when they came they didn't have one to go home."

"I find the issues with my people are life issues like child care, substance abuse issues, living in abusive relationships. They're not ready until those things are dealt with. No matter how nice their resume looks, they may get a job but they'll never keep it. I think there has to be a way to build in those kinds of supports and opportunities for people to get their life under control."

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JOBS, JOBS, JOBS...

The literacy community has always recognized the connection between education and employment, as well as the various personal and systemic barriers faced by literacy students. Another important barrier not yet mentioned however, is the lack of what some people have come to call "real jobs".

At one time, people with lower education levels could compete for employment at decent wages. Nowadays, even those jobs are being snatched up by university graduates who cannot obtain work in their fields. Adults with limited education levels and other barriers are faced with a challenging employment picture. According to Globe and Mail columnist, Bruce Little,

> *"Canada's job market is less able now than it was a decade ago to offer economic security to people in low-income families, many of whom already work. The reasons are familiar - too few jobs and low wages in many of the jobs the poor hold."*[5]

The literacy community has always recognized the connection between education and employment, as well as the various personal and systemic barriers faced by literacy students. Another important barrier not yet mentioned however, is the lack of what some people have come to call "real jobs".

The official unemployment rate in Canada hovers somewhere around 10 percent. Labour market specialists often say that the number is actually much higher, since it does not take into consideration the number of 'discouraged workers': those who have given up searching for jobs or the number of underemployed workers: those who would like full-time jobs but cannot find them. (Schellenberg & Ross: 1997).

Certain populations are most vulnerable to the current labour situation: single parents (mostly women), persons with disabilities, older workers, youth (their unemployment rate is close to 16%; and almost 30% for those who have completed only some high school[6]), and *undereducated workers*.

While there are some indications that this situation is improving (employment rates have risen slightly and several new federal and private sector job creation projects have been announced for youth), change is still slow and for many, imperceptible. The global economy has its price. Many Canadian factories have either shut down. moved to countries where labour costs are lower, or "down-sized", resulting in job losses of thousands of workers. Some economists are starting to predict the expansion of a "two-tiered society of rich and poor (which will threaten) the new prosperity"[7]

[5] Little, Bruce "Prospects For The Poor Get Poorer", *Globe & Mail*, Toronto, March 24, 1997, p. A7
[6] Chamberlain, Art "Private Sector Tackles Jobs", *Brandon Sun*, Brandon, Manitoba, May 17, 1997.
[7] Brandon, (CP): *"Rich-Poor Gap Could Swallow Us All"*, July 4, 1997

What then do literacy workers and students actually know about current labour market situations, how do they get their information, what employment development resources and/or curriculum are instructors using, and what role do they feel literacy plays in preparing people for work?

Knowledge of Labour Market and Information available

Of the 10 students I interviewed, only one felt that the employment outlook was positive:

> *"I've always believed that if you really want to work then you can find a job. But its a matter of where you set your goals."*

"As far as the job market that I'm going for is concerned, its pretty good because its a growing industry. For others in our group - I'm talking about different women and stuff - its harder for them because of the demand. The jobs that they are looking for just aren't out there. The only reason (the employers) want the work experience is they get free labour. Everybody wants something for nothing and everybody wants to give you such a low wage that its not even worth going out to look for work. Benefits for most of those companies are poor. Job security is hard to find."

Another student felt that even though he would have no problems finding work himself, others in his class would face barriers:

> *"As far as the job market that I'm going for is concerned, its pretty good because its a growing industry. For others in our group - I'm talking about different women and stuff - its harder for them because of the demand. The jobs that they are looking for just aren't out there. The only reason (the employers) want the work experience is they get free labour. Everybody wants something for nothing and everybody wants to give you such a low wage that its not even worth going out to look for work. Benefits for most of those companies are poor. Job security is hard to find."*

Most of the students and instructors voiced concern about the lack of employment opportunities and about the proliferation of minimum wage jobs:

> Student A: *"I could have sworn when I was 18 that there was about 4 pages of the general (classified ads) and now its like 2 lines. And a lot of them they ask for experience and then you look at the wages and they're only willing to give you minimum wage."*
> Student B: *"Minimum wage is still better than we've got now (on social assistance)"*
> Student A: *"I think maybe for a single person it would be fine, but for a family its not."*

> Instructor: *"We have university graduates in our town who cannot get work. My students aren't going to get a job ahead of them. It's just not going to happen".*

> Instructor: *"I have skilled people coming to my literacy class taking computers because they don't have a job. The possibility of them getting a job is so slim because there's so much competition out there."*

> Instructor: *"Well, one of my students said a couple of months ago..that he got fed up of going down to the employment office and seeing on the board jobs that he had done a year ago and now the requirement is you have to have your grade 12. But he has already done them for years but now there is no point in him applying because now they require grade 12."*

Instructor: *"They are saying 'I don't want a (minimum wage) job. Where am I going to fit into the job market? I can't live like that for the rest of my life'. Minimum wage jobs are all they are going to get."*

Student: *"You know, the way things are today, people who are employers they can pick and choose because there are so many of us out there who do not have jobs. That's what I found when I was working. My supervisor would go through hundreds of applications and she could pick and choose because she knew that these people needed work... And people won't hire you if you're over-educated and experienced for that job. And if you're undereducated, well they won't hire you either. So they have that choice to pick and choose."*

Literacy instructors and students get their information on labour market trends from a variety of sources, including newspapers, journals, the internet, personal contact with employers, and word-of-mouth. This data is constantly changing however, and information is often inaccessible and confusing, particularly for low income, lower literacy adults.

"I would like more training.There are lots of areas where I feel confident - for example resume-writing and that kind of thing - but as far as hidden job markets and that... we need more instruction in that area."

Employability Resources & Training:

Several instructors that I interviewed wished they had more employment development *training* and *resources* available to them (incl. books, computers, software, access to the internet, and human resources). This was particularly true of the rural, community-based literacy programs, and for those working with distinct populations.

"I guess in my position we find that there aren't resources available. I can't seem to get my hands on resources available for my type of learner (persons with mental disabilities). Everything that is there is I've had to re-adapt."

"I would like more training.There are lots of areas where I feel confident - for example resume-writing and that kind of thing - but as far as hidden job markets and that... we need more instruction in that area."

"I think we have a lot of print resources but it would be nice to have more visual and audio resources for people who aren't able to learn through print. And I guess practical experience... if we had people in the community who would practice an interview with them"

Currently, most instructors are not using a particular curriculum but rather adapting a variety of tools to meet the needs of individual clients.[8]

"We don't have a specific curriculum. We use whatever comes to hand or doesn't. If there's nothing designed we design it ourselves".

"When a client comes in and says: 'I need a driver's licence', that's what we work on. There are other organizations in the community to do job coaching. We work on the transition to employment."

"The portfolios, which is another method we use, gear items to eventual employment. So, if you are doing a story or writing something then it should be geared to that (employment) so that you are getting the academic skills as well".

The *role* of literacy programs, for the most part, has always been to offer students a stepping stone to higher education, employment, and greater opportunities for self-sufficiency. As one instructor put it:

"(Students) are constantly told by the media and by their case workers (in some instances) that until they get properly educated they will not find work, other than the menial dishwasher or burger-slinging jobs. Literacy increases the chance of their being able to find more meaningful work. This happens not only through increasing their academic skills, but also their interpersonal and social skills".

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Much of this academic and personal growth takes time. For the many students who come to programs carrying other "heavy baggage" such as financial concerns, addictions, ill health, stress, learning disabilities, and physical or mental abuse - a great deal of time and support services are needed to assist them . Most literacy instructors know all too well that they wear many hats in any given day: that of instructor, counsellor, advocate, even janitor!

Recently, instructors have been encouraged to put on yet another hat: that of vocational counsellor. Many literacy workers in Manitoba are now requested to report on employment outcomes of students who have been enrolled in their classes. As a result of new welfare legislation, a number of programs have been developed specifically with an employability focus (i.e Community Partnerships and Employment Development Centre programs).

Some instructors feel quite prepared for the challenge ahead. Others are concerned as to what this new policy direction will mean to their overall programming. Regardless, it is important that those working in the literacy field are aware of what the actual changes are, and become engaged in the debate surrounding literacy's role within this changing context.

[8] A list of resources used by Community Partnerships and EDC programs was generated at a Program Review meeting in Winnipeg in April. This list has been included in the Appendix.

[9] Tessier, Angela "Literacy Facing Employment Outcomes", *Write On!* Literacy Partners of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Vol 7, No. 1, 1997

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FROM WELFARE TO WORK:

Welfare Reform and the Literacy Community

The majority of adults enrolled in literacy programs receive some sort of government income assistance. Over the last few years sweeping changes, often referred to as 'Welfare Reforms', have been taking place within social assistance (welfare) systems across Canada. Many people, including welfare recipients themselves, are unaware of exactly what the changes are, how they came about, and what they mean. This lack of awareness is not surprising. Information about the new legislation is difficult to find and even more difficult to understand.

It is crucial that welfare recipients, literacy workers, and other service providers become aware of the new welfare policies and how the legislated changes may affect programming, etc. First though, it is necessary to look at how the shifts came about.

On April 1, 1996 the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) came into effect. It replaced the federal Canada Assistance Plan, or CAP, as it was known. CAP funded social assistance with the provinces on a cost-shared basis, as well as health and post-secondary education. With the introduction of the CHST block funding, significant changes to the welfare system have taken place:[10]

It is crucial that welfare recipients, literacy workers, and other service providers become aware of the new welfare policies and how the legislated changes may affect programming

- virtually all national conditions or standards have been eliminated (except for the prohibition of residency requirements);
- health, welfare, and post-secondary education have been combined under the same block funding apparatus; and
- substantial reductions in overall payments to social programs have occurred (an estimated 25% or $ 7 billion will be eliminated over a 2-year period).

Provincial governments in turn implemented a variety of policies intended to respond to the CHST. On May 1st, 1996 the Manitoba government announced cuts that would reduce payments to employable single person and couples without children by over 10%. Single parent households with children over six years of age saw an overall reduction of just over 2%. Rates all other persons remained the same.[11]

[10] These changes are outlined in NAPO's report: *"Monitoring The Impacts On Social Assistance Recipients Of Welfare Cuts And Changes: An Overview"* (Oct., 1996).

[11] Manitoba Legislative Assembly, *Media Backgrounder: Employment and Income Assistance, p. 2.*

Then, on September 16, 1996, Manitoba passed Bill 36. Many welfare advocates have expressed concern that under this new legislation, clients will continue to see their welfare benefits shrink, and that regulations will become even more restrictive and discretionary than under previous legislation.[12]

For example, certain basic needs items (food, clothing, and specific medical treatments) have now been included under one main heading: *"things and services that are essential to health and well-being"* (*Bill 36*, Section 2, p. 4). Some advocates are worried that clients will no longer be able to access each service individually and that workers will have "absolute discretion in deciding what is necessary for a client" (*NAPO News*: Nov., 1996, No. 55, p. 1)

Perhaps the most significant changes to come out of Bill 36 are the 'obligations for employment' clause and the 'employability enhancement measures' (sometimes referred to as 'Workfare'). Under this new clause, people who have been deemed "employable" are required to develop an employment history and personal job plan, and to engage in an active job search. This could mean as many as 25 job searches per week, depending on what community the person lives in and what a particular case worker feels is reasonable.

Those who fail to meet these obligations can be penalized:

> *10 (2) "Where (a) an applicant or recipient under section 5.1 of the Act who does not have dependent children; or (b) the spouse of such an applicant or recipient... fails to meet an obligation set out in subsection (1), the director may deny, reduce, suspend or discontinue the general assistance otherwise payable to or on behalf of that household."*
>
> *10 (3) "Where (a) an applicant or recipient who has one or more dependent children; (b) the spouse of such an applicant or recipient, or (c) a child to whom the obligations set out in subsection (1) apply fails to meet an obligation set out in subsection (1), the director may reduce the amount of social allowance or general assistance to which the applicant or recipient would otherwise be entitled by (d) $50.00 per month; and (e) if the obligations under subsection (1) are not met after 6 months of benefit reduction under clause (d) whether the months are consecutive or not, by a further $50.00 per month for each household member who fails to meet the obligations..."*

Single parents with children under six are exempt from these employment expectations "if they have not received assistance, including basic assistance, *while participating in training or other activities* to improve their eligibility" (*Administrative Manual*, Section 11, p. 6. italics, mine).

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[12] Notes taken from interviews with various welfare experts, September, 1997

[13] These obligations do not apply to the disabled, the elderly, and persons in authorized crisis facilities (Manitoba Legislative Assembly. *Administrative Manual for Employment And Income Assistance Act*, June, 1996, Section 11, p. 5).

Under this new system, single parents with children over the age of 6 are deemed employable.

" Although family responsibilities present an additional barrier to employment for single parents, this barrier can be overcome... Once children are in school barriers are reduced, parents have additional time available on job search and to take on employment expectations" (Manitoba Legislative Assembly: *Administrative Manual for Employment And Income Assistance Act*, June, 1996, *Section 13, p.1)*

Participants in the focus groups were asked what they *knew* about the legislated changes to welfare and whether these changes had *affected the students or programs in any way.* Most of them (literacy instructors and students alike) had some notion of what 'Welfare Reform' meant, but none had read the actual legislation. Many of the participants talked about the lack of information available to them, as well as the mixed messages they got from workers or directors. Virtually all of them mentioned how *discretionary* the policies seem to be:

Instructor: *"I think the only information we've had has been a few discussions (with other CP literacy workers) because it affects all of our literacy programs and clients. But without having the actual physical legislation to say that this is the new law... we haven't personally received anything".*

"They made about a $ 150 cutback within our whole budget. We were already on the poverty line and then they go and make cutbacks like that".

Instructor: *"I was generally aware (of the changes) but like everyone else I haven't seen anything in writing or met with anyone".*

Instructor: *"(Information) differs from counsellor to counsellor. Some are very positive, others look at the files and go by the book. Other counsellors say 'okay, I'll give you another chance".*

Student: *"Everything is word of mouth. And they'll say no to one person but another person will get it".*

Student: *"They give you a form called rights and obligations but it's pretty well all obligations. There's nothing that says you have a right to bedding, beds."*

Student: *I think different workers make up their own rules. It doesn't sound like there's a set of books where there's a standard for everybody".*

Most of the students interviewed had been affected negatively by the *rate reductions:*

"They made about a $150 cutback within our whole budget. We were already on the poverty line and then they go and make cutbacks like that".

"With a kid on enfalac (baby formula), baby food, diapers, and my boys eat like horses... With my family allowance, welfare, and my mom and dad I do it. I always rely on my mom and dad."

"I have to make money stretch with 5 kids now. It's hard."

"Sometimes when I run out of groceries I go to the Salvation Army for food. Its not all the time but it helps."

The students also mentioned other ways in which Bill 36 was affecting their lives and their ability to upgrade their education. I have broken these comments down into 3 main areas: work expectations, child care, and issues of general stress:

Work expectations

"My old man is working full time so I can't go to school at the same time. I have to show I am looking for a job. I put in 5 (applications) just to look like I'm looking for a job...And sometimes when I hand in my sheet they (the employers) say it's a waste of time - they're not hiring anyway."

Student A: *"Before I got into the (Community Partnerships) program they had a different program through social assistance where you had to go out and had to make 20 applications a week...They want me to go out because I am meant to be the sole bread winner. Not only am I supposed to be doing this full time but they want me to be out doing part time evenings, weekends and everything else. They want me going to school and looking for work at the same time."*
Student B: *"How can you go for an interview if you are supposed to be at school?"*
Student A: *"They don't care."*

"We were told if we didn't (look for work) we would get cut off the system. Whether you have kids or not we were told if you don't get this sheet filled out then you will be cut off the system. They can do anything they want."

"We were told if we didn't (look for work) we would get cut off the system. Whether you have kids or not we were told if you don't get this sheet filled out then you will be cut off the system. They can do anything they want."

"I don't think that's right. If you are getting an education so you can get a job to get off the system why would they penalise you? ... The idea of penalising you for getting an education - that's ridiculous."

"It seems like you are getting punished because you are trying to do something."

Child care:

Student A: *"With me going to school full time my wife was offered a job through social assistance for the flood clean up of the sand bags. She was offered about $10 an hour. She went for the interview. She asked all the questions like what am I going to do about child care. None of that was in the works at all. There's still a lot of pressure issues. My wife would like to go out to work. Well that's not applicable because there's no child care. You can't go privately at all. It has to be a (government) day care facility and subsidised"*

"The only way I can really explain the welfare system is like being in jail. You're thrown out of jail on your ears and you're stuck with this responsibility with nowhere to go. The only way to explain the system is that you're stuck in one position and you can't move."

Student B: "Why can't you go privately?"
Student A: "Well because my child has ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and is hyperactive. He's been kicked out of every one so far."

"What really irks me about the day care part is that if you go to almost any day care where there is subsidy it's mostly for provincial (welfare recipients). Like provincial has slots in a lot of day cares if the mums are going to school or whatever but City doesn't have that... My husband, unfortunately he's had some serious illnesses in the past 6 months so he is unable to work... and like for him to have to care for my child for that half a day got a little tough on him so I wanted to put her in day care and they said 'No'. ...I'm going to school to get a better education and what are we going to do with our child? We need that day care."

General stress

"The only way I can really explain the welfare system is like being in jail. You're thrown out of jail on your ears and you're stuck with this responsibility with nowhere to go. The only way to explain the system is that you're stuck in one position and you can't move."

"I feel that (welfare's) expectations of individuals are unrealistic sometimes because they don't really look at their background like where they come from and what they've done and what they've achieved and what have you. They just see you as an individual - you look healthy therefore you can go to work and it doesn't matter what kind of work it is, just as long as you get a job and really I don't think that's good."

I haven't seen anything change in their expectations for me. When I got here I pretty much told them this is where I'm at. I want to get educated and off the system and they are letting me do it at least so far".

One student, however, expressed positive experiences with the welfare system:

"If it wasn't for welfare ...my children would be in foster care and I would be robbing banks for a living... When I got here I went and saw the worker and told them that I was a single (parent), I had been off crack (cocaine) about 2 months and I told them this, this, and this and they signed me up with a drug counsellor that came to the house every day of the week, every morning - which was really helpful. And I had home care because of my back. But no changes, I don't have to report back. I haven't seen anything change in their expectations for me. When I got here I pretty much told them this is where I'm at. I want to get educated and off the system and they are letting me do it at least so far".

Literacy workers also stated that welfare changes had affected their students and their programming. For some, the changes have been positive:

"Initially I was appalled by the attitude of Income Security regarding the 'workfare' policy. But I have seen it work for several people. It forced them to think about their goals for the future and to put some concrete plans into place and then into motion... Not all people are ready for this change, *and for*

those people I feel that Income Security should be more supportive and encouraging rather than threatening"

"The provincial counsellor here, if you're on assistance and have 3 months to look for a job and if you haven't found a job in 3 months then they will get together with you and say 'What's the problem?' If they analyse education as the problem they will send you to school."

"I think overall some of the changes are very positive in that I think that the government, in it's own way and for it's own reasons, is trying to channel people towards employment. And I have seen some social assistance workers trying to look for opportunities for people and for the most part being relatively supportive of them... So I think that if it is carried out in the right way then it is a very positive thing but it is open to be misused."

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Most instructors voiced great concern however, about the *unrealistic expectations* imposed by various case workers, the *time constraints* that some of the literacy programs now face, the lack of additional *support services* (counselling, child care, transportation, etc.) needed for programs to be effective, and by the fact that some students are being given a *"one shot deal"*. That is, they are being denied access to literacy training because they are now deemed 'employable'. Here is some of the dialogue that occurred around these issues:

"I think that many of the people in government have no understanding of what it's like to be on social assistance and they just don't know or recognise that someone might not have a bus fare or they think it's mismanagement for someone not to have enough money to buy food and for food to last. I think the majority of people just do not understand. In my mind it's just not possible to survive."

Instructor A: *"There' are lots of barriers. It's getting in. Those who can get in - their sponsors are willing to support. But not all of them will let them in."*
JS: *"So, does that vary from region to region?"*
Instructor A: *"Absolutely. It varies from community to community, from counsellor to counsellor in the city. There are some counsellors who say 'No, you are not going to school'."*
Instructor B: *"And if you go to school you don't get welfare."*
Instructor C: *"So they would rather you were on welfare and beating the street to find a job than going to school to get the proper training so you can get a job and be off welfare. It's almost like 'Be on welfare without an education or be on the street and do whatever you have to do' That's where the system is lacking big time."*

"One of my students registered at high school ... and they accepted her as a mature student and everything was going fine. Then when she went in to talk to her financial worker... they said 'you can't. You have to find a job. If you can go to school you can find a job.' She could not read at a grade 4 level. But she was expected to do something."

"It does depend on the counsellors. You still have the odd counsellor that honestly expects a person to go from a level one student to a grade 12 in like 4 months. They are supposed to have all the education they need in 4 months, be employable and have a job at the end of it!"

"There are so many issues that are really beyond what you can do in a classroom program of this type. Until we get some kind of system where there are resources for counselling, for building support groups.. and all that stuff I don't think the possibility of these people getting jobs is very high"

"In the Spring of '96 we lost huge numbers of people... It's not been unsaid but it's really important. The client group - the students that we used to have we don't have anymore - but they haven't gone away. They're still out there. They are not going anywhere but they are there. They've slipped through another crack. (One of our students) is a good example of what happens to someone when they just lose it all. In the middle of last winter he was working... he was working for chips and coke and a place to sleep. Which meant a boarded up room which didn't have a lock on the door and a mattress on the floor. He had no heat in the room... And he was putting in 40, 50, 60 hours a week... That's how he was living. That's where they go. Or they go and live with their kids and then disappear."

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OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

The Literacy, Welfare, and Work Preliminary Study set out to explore the *perceptions and realities* of a group of literacy workers and students in relation to education and employment, within the new context of 'Welfare Reform'. The research employed a *holistic approach* to this complex issue, examining both systemic and personal barriers, as well as positive education and employment opportunities that exist for students. A combined methodology of focus group interviews and a literature review allowed the research to place the experiences of individuals within the larger socioeconomic and political context.

The findings from this study are, as the title suggests, preliminary. Definitive statements and recommendations cannot be made at this time, based on the small sample population studied. However, it is possible to make some observations about emerging issues and trends that will be further explored in the next stage of the research: the LWW Longitudinal Research Project:

- **Literacy education is a very important factor in realizing employment and alleviating poverty:**

Literacy instructors and students recognize that education is a crucial step to finding employment and breaking out of poverty. Literacy programs provide important opportunities for growth, both personal and academic. These skills in turn increase students' abilities to find and keep a job and to become more self-sufficient.

- **A number of barriers exist for students moving from welfare to work:**

Instructors and students are keenly aware of the importance of education in the transition from welfare to work. However, they also realize that a number of personal and structural barriers make this shift very difficult. Barriers to education and employment include: poverty, family violence, poor health, lack of housing and child care, racism, and other forms of discrimination. In order to over come these difficulties students need sufficient time and support services which, in many cases, are lacking.

- **The relationship between education and work is complex:**

Researchers also warn us that the links between literacy and employment are complex and cannot be dealt with in a reductionist manner (i.e literacy=work). The labour market situation is constantly changing and, while the "new economy" promises more jobs in the future, there is evidence that many of these jobs are of the part-time, low wage variety and that many people are still being left out of the employment picture. It has been noted that no amount of education and training will solve the problem of a lack of jobs. [14]

[14] (D'Amico, Debbie: "The Emperor's New Jobs: Welfare Reform, Unemployment, and Education Policy", *Urban Anthropology*, Vol. 25, No. 2)

- **More information on welfare legislation and the labour market is needed. Students and instructors also need better support services and other resources:**

Literacy workers seem to understand that, under the new welfare legislation, they will be required to take on a greater role in preparing students for work. Most are willing to take on the challenge. However, instructors do recognize that the economic situation is difficult and that labour market trends are constantly evolving. Both students and instructors voiced the need for more current information on labour market trends and ways in which students can best access the market.

For example, very few of the students and instructors interviewed knew about Bill 36 and what this new welfare legislation actually entails, although most had experienced some changes since the legislation was enacted. Most of the students indicated that they had been affected negatively by rate reductions and that work expectations (i.e. the new 'employment enhancement measures') and lack of supports such as childcare and transportation were making educational up-grading difficult. Students and instructors also commented on the discretionary nature of welfare policies, and that being on welfare is often extremely difficult and stressful.

Based on the results of the literature review and focus group interviews, it is clear that literacy workers want and need more *information, support services, and other resources*, if they are to help their students make the transition from welfare to *real* work opportunities.

- **In this changing climate, more dialogue and flexibility is required:**

Literacy workers and other adult educators must engage in on-going, positive, dialogue with policy-makers and program staff within Welfare and Employment Development offices, sharing information and coming to agreement on what is best for the students.

- **Student participation in decision-making is a must:**

It is equally important that the students themselves be listened to. All too often, policies and programs are developed without clients' full input and participation. This report has shown, I hope, that the majority of students in literacy programs demonstrate a strong commitment to learning, a keen understanding of the issues that affect their lives, and a willingness to become involved in making positive choices for themselves and their families. Their words cannot go unheard.

APPENDIX

SOME RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR TEACHING LITERACY AND EMPLOYABILITY*

Publications

- Breakthrough to Math
- Cambridge GED
- Conference Board of Canada: Employability Skills
- Connections
- Damn Good Resumé
- Employability Skills Portfolio (book and video, available from Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce)
- Its Your Right
- Job Seekers Handbook: A Guide for Literacy and ESL Learners (available from Employment Projects for Women, Winnipeg, 1995)
- Power Reading
- Practical Manual for Job Hunters
- WESCANA: Materials for low level literacy
- What Colour Is Your Parachute?

Authentic Literacy Materials

- Employment insurance forms
- Employment Standards (workbook)
- Company policies and procedures (manuals)
- Newspapers

Outside Speakers

- Employment Connections
- Speakers' Bureau (developed by Regional Coordinators for Literacy Partners of Manitoba)
- Business people

Technology

- Word Perfect 6.1 formats for resumés, etc.
- Netscape searches for career-oriented materials
- Red River Community College/ Assiniboine Community College video tape libraries for career-oriented materials

* This compiled list of resources resulted from a meeting on April 17, 1997 between representatives from adult literacy programs who were involved with providing employability-related programming for EDP (Employment Development Programs and Community Parterships clientele and staff from the provincial Adult Literacy and Continuing Education department. The list is by no means complete. It is intended as a representation of the types of resources and supportive curricula that is used in these programs for teaching literacy and employability. Used with permission from Adult Literacy and Continuing Education.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE WITH LITERACY INSTRUCTORS[15]

I. PRELIMINARIES

(1) Introduction: & Informed Consent:

Introduce myself and Caroline. Discuss our roles. Provide background on LWW Project and purpose of interview (give out 1-page project description). Pass around consent forms and go over them. Ask if there are any questions. Get participants to sign them. Pass around mailing sheet (names and addresses).

(2) Ask all group members to make introductions. Go over ground rules as follows:

"There is no hidden agenda to the discussion. What we want is for you to take this as an opportunity to share your thoughts and opinions freely on the subject of welfare reform, literacy and employment. What I am going to do is spend the next hour and a half (approximately) asking questions designed to get a full picture of your thoughts and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers to anything I ask - only your honest opinions. I will be asking you to answer some questions in turn and others I will open up for general discussion. I ask that you try to speak one at a time in a clear voice (loud enough so that the tape recorder can pick up). Please regard this tape recorder as simply an extension of my memory, so that Caroline and I can transcribe your words exactly. Everything you say, of course, is confidential and the results of this discussion will be reported anonymously. Once the report has been written the tape will be destroyed. You have each been given a pad of paper and pen in case you wish to make notes to yourselves during the interview."

Does anyone have any questions on how we are going to proceed?

II. ISSUES AND RELATED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) "The first thing I would like to do is to ask you to introduce yourself and to tell me a little bit about the literacy program you teach in.
Probes: (name, your title and role, main literacy focus, funding, etc.)

[15] The discussion guides used in the FGI's are included in the Appendix. The complete transcribed texts are available from the author upon request.

(2) **"Can you tell me about your definition or philosophy of literacy? (open discussion)**

(3) **"Now I'd like to ask you about the students who enrol in your programs.. (in turn)**

- What percentage of your students are working (Full-time, part-time, shift work, casual)?
- What percentage of them are receiving social assistance of some kind (band sponsorship, UIC, welfare, etc.)? Of this number, what % are on welfare? (How many EDC students do you have?)
- Do these students come into the program with specific personal, academic, and/or employment goals? What are these goals?
- What % of these students would state employment as their MAIN goal?
- What role do you believe literacy plays in preparing people for work?

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to this particular topic of discussion?"

(4) **The next set of questions has to do with curriculum and other resources you use in your programs to help your students meet their employment (and other) goals: (open discussion)**

- First of all, can you tell me what skills you believe are needed in the workplace? How do you find out what skills are needed? Do you have access to current labour market information?
- Are these skills being taught in the classroom? If so, how are they being taught?
- Describe any curriculum or other resources you use in employment preparation.
- How effective do you find these curriculum/resources to be?
- Are there any other resources you wish you had? Why don't you have them?
- How prepared do you feel you are (or other program staff) to prepare students for work? What do you need to become better prepared?

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to this particular topic of discussion?"

(5) **Our next topic is jobs.**

- What do you believe is the real job situation "out there"? Explain.
- What kinds of jobs are your students being prepared for? Why? (probe: is the decision based on their own goals? goals set by others? Labour market-driven?)
- Do you have any mechanism (formal or informal) for tracking students after they leave your program? Describe.
- What % of your students end up taking a job upon graduating from your program?
- What kinds of jobs (if any) do these students end up taking and for how long?
- Do your students face any barriers to getting and/or keeping a job? If yes, what do you think these barriers are?

- For those students who do not find work upon graduation, what activities do they become involved in (stay on welfare? go on to university or college? other?)

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to this particular topic of discussion?"

(6) I'd like to ask you a little bit about the changes to welfare legislation that have occurred recently (open).

- Are you aware of these changes? Can you describe to me what they are? How have you become informed of the changes?
- Have these changes affected your students, your program, or you as a literacy instructor in any way? (If yes) How? Can you give me any case examples?

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to this particular topic of discussion?"

(7) I'd like to review what has been discussed thus far.

We've talked about literacy programs, students, curriculum, the role of literacy in employment preparation, labour market trends, and welfare reform and its impact on students and programs. Now I'd like to hear about any recommendations you might have regarding literacy and employment preparation for adult learners (i.e programming, curriculum, supports for learners, labour market, welfare system, etc.). You can be as broad or as specific as you like.

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to this particular topic of discussion?"

III. CLOSING REMARKS

- Thank you's
- Review how information will be used and printing of final report.
- Ask for any comments/suggestions on the FGI process
- Ask participants to write down the titles of any employment preparation curriculum they use and to leave it with me before they go.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE WITH LITERACY STUDENTS[16]

I. Preliminaries

(1) **Opening comments & Informed Consent:** Introduce myself and Caroline. Discuss our roles (i.e doing research on the issue of literacy, welfare, and work) and purpose of FGI. Discuss confidentiality. Discuss target group. Ask if anyone is **not** on some form of assistance. Pass around consent forms and go over them. Ask if there are any questions. Get participants to sign them.

(2) **Go over ground rules as follows:**

"There is no hidden agenda to the discussion. What we want is for you to use this as an opportunity to share your thoughts and opinions freely on the subject of literacy, welfare, and work. What I am going to do is spend the 2 hours asking questions designed to get a full picture of your thoughts and feelings. The only ground rules to remember here are that there are no right or wrong answers to anything I ask - only your honest opinions. I ask that you try to speak one at a time and to think of this tape recorder as my "memory" so that later, when we write down your words, we record them exactly. Everything you say, of course, is confidential (your names will not be used in any reports or publications). You have each been given a pad of paper in case you wish to make notes to yourselves while awaiting your turn"

Does anyone have any questions on how we are going to proceed?

II. Issues and Related discussion questions:

(1) "The first thing I would like to do is to go around the table and ask each of you to introduce yourself and to tell me the name of your literacy program and how long you have been enrolled in this program.

(2) "Now I'd like to ask you a little bit more about yourself as a literacy **student**...

- WHY did you decide to enrol in literacy training? What are your literacy goals (probes: personal goals, academic goals, employment goals)? What do you think is your MAIN goal at this point?
- Did you set those goals yourself? Did anyone else help you set them (if so, how?)
- Is your participation in literacy training helping you to meet your goals? If so, how?
- Do you regularly review these goals? If so, with whom (counsellor, instructor, etc.)

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to this topic of discussion?"

[16] The discussion guides used in the FGI's are included in the Appendix. The complete transcribed texts are available from the author upon request.

(3) The next set of questions are about the **learning materials** you use in your programs:
- Can you tell me about what you are learning and the names (if you recall) of any specific learning materials you are using? (probe re. employment preparation materials).
- How effective do you find these learning materials? Are they easy to understand?
- Do you think the employment preparation materials you are using will help you to find a job? Why? Why not?

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to the topic of discussion on learning materials?"

(4) Our next topic is **jobs**.
- Do you hope to get a job upon graduation from your literacy program?
- What kinds of job do you hope to get? Why?
- How do you think you will get that job?
- Do you think it will be difficult or easy to get a job? Why? (probe: if they say difficult - specifically what makes it difficult for you to get a job?
- If you don't get a job right away, what do you plan to do?(stay on welfare? go on to university or college? other?)

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to the topic of jobs?"

(5) Now I'd like to ask you a little bit about your experiences with the **welfare system.**
- How long have you been on assistance?
- Are you aware of the recent changes to the welfare system? Can you describe to me what they are? How did you learn about the changes?
- Have these changes affected you in any way? (If yes) How? Can you give me an example?
- What expectations/requirements, if any, must you meet while you are on welfare (i.e academic, employment, etc.)? Have these requirements changed since the spring of '96?
- How are these expectations explained to you: in writing, verbally, other?
- How often do you meet with your welfare worker to review your situation?
- Tell me a bit about what goes on in meetings with your worker. Do you feel that your worker provides you with the support and information you need to achieve your goals? If yes, how? If no, what do you need from your worker?

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to the discussion on welfare?"

(6) I'd like to review what has been discussed thus far. We've talked about literacy programs, your own goals as students, the learning materials you use, jobs, and welfare. Now I'd like to hear about any **recommendations** you might have regarding employment preparation for adult learners (i.e programming, curriculum, supports for learners, labour market, welfare system, etc.). You can be as broad or as specific as you like.

"Does anyone wish to add anything else to the topic of discussion on recommendations?"

III. Closing remarks
- Thank you's
- Review how information will be used and ask if they would like a copy of the final report.
- Ask for any comments/suggestions on the FGI process
- Ask participants to fill out Face Sheet (provide assistance, if needed)

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NOTES

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